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# Oil Spill: How Is Air Quality Affected?

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## Enbridge Oil Spill

Marshall, Michigan

August 19, 2010

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### For more information

If you have questions, comments or need more information about the Enbridge oil spill you can contact:

#### **Don de Blasio**

EPA Community Involvement  
Coordinator

Cell Phone: 312-343-6666

Office Voice Mail: 312-886-4360

deblasio.don@epa.gov

### On the Web

EPA has established a website at [www.epa.gov/enbridgespill](http://www.epa.gov/enbridgespill) to provide daily information about the response.

### More contacts

#### **Public:**

A toll-free number for the public has been established for this emergency:

**800-306-6837**

#### **Media members:**

**888-363-8632**

[spillpress@epa.gov](mailto:spillpress@epa.gov)

On Monday, July 26, 2010, Enbridge Energy Partners LLP reported a 30-inch pipeline ruptured near Marshall, Michigan. The company estimates that more than 800,000 gallons of crude oil spilled into Talmadge Creek, a waterway that feeds the Kalamazoo River. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has not independently confirmed this number. The spill has affected up to 30 miles of the Kalamazoo River. The spill site, between Marshall and Battle Creek, includes marshlands, residential areas, farmland and businesses.

Here are some answers to frequently asked questions regarding air quality:

### How has the oil spill affected the air?

In the first few days of the response people noticed a very strong odor especially near the broken pipe and near the waterways impacted by the spill. More recently, with the spill now contained and the ruptured pipe removed, complaints of odors have decreased. To ensure public safety, air quality has been continuously monitored throughout the area for a wide range of chemicals that are known to be associated with crude oil, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These same chemicals are also emitted by many other sources such as motor vehicles, paints or solvents.

EPA is monitoring the air with “real time” instruments that can provide immediate information about the levels of these chemicals in the air. Air samples are also being collected and analyzed for a wide variety of chemicals.

### Is the odor bad for my health?

It is important to understand that people are able to smell some VOCs and other oil-related chemicals at levels much lower than would cause long-term health problems. Some of the chemicals that cause the odors may cause headaches, dizziness, nausea or vomiting. If you are sensitive to these chemicals stay indoors. If you continue to experience odor problems, contact the Enbridge public information line, 800-306-6837. If possible, close windows and doors, turn your air conditioner on and set to a recirculation mode. If you have severe nausea or other medical issues, please see your health care provider as soon as possible.

### Why are families being asked to voluntarily evacuate or relocate? Will I need to leave my home?

Air quality is monitored around the clock. The tools being used can

provide immediate information about the levels of chemicals in the air. The air sampling results have shown one chemical – benzene – at a level of potential concern for long-term health. Based on these concerns, the Calhoun County Public Health Department issued a voluntary evacuation notice on July 29 for people living in the most highly impacted areas. As of Aug. 18, Calhoun County Health Department announced that most residents could return to their homes based on air samples indicating the area is safe for re-occupancy. As the response progresses, it is possible there might be additional need for relocation.

### **How might benzene affect my health?**

Exposure to these levels of benzene can affect people differently. Some people may feel sleepy or dizzy. Others may get headaches. Benzene can also cause nausea, vomiting or a rapid heart rate. Long-term exposures to benzene may increase your risk of cancer. This is one of the key reasons the Calhoun County Public Health Department issued a voluntary evacuation.

To evaluate the chemical monitoring information, public health scientists compare air sampling results to health-based screening concentrations (also called “screening levels”). These screening levels are developed from health effects information about each VOC, including information regarding exposure levels that might pose an increased risk of health problems. At this time, EPA is using screening levels that assume a person is breathing a pollutant continuously (24 hours a day, seven days a week) for as long as one year.

### **What if I have health concerns related to the oil spill?**

If you live in an area affected by the oil spill and have questions about the potential impact on your health, call your doctor or contact the Calhoun County Public Health Department, 269-969-6341, or the Kalamazoo County Health Department, 269-373-5210. If you are experiencing serious health problems, seek immediate medical care or call 911.